

Aggressive driving, which can evolve into violent behavior known as “road rage,” can cause many serious problems on our highways, including deaths of drivers and passengers. New and veteran drivers must be aware of both aggressive driving and road rage and know how to deal with each when they occur. In particular, aggressive driving can occur sometimes without us even knowing it, yet it affects others with whom we share the road. It has been called a volatile and volcanic mix of emotion and thinking that seems tragically well suited for expression in motor vehicles.

Most of us know that driving is a privilege and comes with responsibilities. One of those is self-control. Here are some recent examples of what happened when self-control, caution and responsibility were disregarded:

- A man is shot with a crossbow on the side of a highway and dies after he and another motorist pulled over and argued over his allegedly refusing to move from the fast lane.
- A passenger dies when his Chevy Blazer rolls over, throwing him into the backseat. The accident followed an incident in which a passenger in his vehicle and one in another car exchanged insults with each other because one vehicle refused to let the other pass. Soon they were chasing each other and ramming each other’s vehicles, causing the rollover.
- A young college student was shot to death when he could not disarm the loud anti-theft alarm in his jeep.

Reasons for Aggressive Driving

Those are just a few examples of the incidents that unfortunately and needlessly occur on our roads daily. Experts across the country have been studying the issue of aggressive driving and road rage.

There are a number of different reasons for the increase of incidents:

- Increased traffic congestion on roads.
- Parents who teach children that getting angry at other motorists and behaving aggressively toward them while on the road is permissible.
- A general decline in courtesy and civility.
- More youths today with vehicles, but not possessing the maturity to drive them responsibly and with caution during tense situations.
- Conflicts from other areas of our lives that ride with us in the car: family issues, marital problems, resentments from the job, difficulties with authority and feeling controlled by others.
- A sense of “territory” that leads us to presume that we own the space around us and our vehicle. When another vehicle invades that space in a way we dislike, we have an increase and unfounded tendency today to strike back.
- A sense that as vehicles have become safer to drive we are immune from danger in them, even at high speeds.
- Vehicles are often seen as “extensions” of ourselves and that ease of operation gives us the false sense that we control all aspects of the vehicle, including mechanical functioning of the car as we operate it carelessly.

How to Avoid Conflict on the Road

There are solutions to these problems, but most of them come from within each of us. Here are some helpful tips to remember:

- Often another driver’s aggressive driving makes one feel compelled to retaliate. However, it is best to leave punishment to the police. Call the police to report any instances of aggressive driving when you arrive at your destination.

- Don’t compete on the road. Driving is not a contest. Let others who are racing pass you. Although it is difficult to say, let aggressive drivers have their accidents elsewhere.
- If another driver does something to anger you, talk to your passengers about it rather than use your vehicle as a weapon to retaliate.
- If you get angry easily and feel you do not have the best frame of mind while driving, consider postponing the trip until you feel better, have a friend drive or call a taxi.
- Give an aggressive driver the benefit of the doubt - it is possible or likely he or she made a mistake from fatigue or failing to pay attention, but did not intentionally set out to cause a problem for you.

Motorists would be well advised to keep their cool in traffic. Be patient and courteous to other drivers, and correct unsafe driving habits that are likely to endanger, infuriate, or antagonize other motorists.

Behaviors That Can Cause Trouble

Be aware of the behaviors that have resulted in violence in the past:

Lane Blocking. Don’t block the passing lane. Stay out of the far left lane and yield to the right for any vehicle wanting to pass.

Tailgating. Maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you. Dozens of deadly traffic altercations begin when one driver tailgates another.

Signal Lights. Don’t switch lanes without first signaling your intention to do so, and make sure you don’t cut someone off when you move over. After you’ve made the maneuver, turn your signal off.

Gestures. If you want to wave to another driver, please use all of your fingers, not just one. Obscene gestures have gotten people shot, stabbed, or beaten.

Horn. Use your horn sparingly. If you must get someone's attention in a non-emergency situation, tap your horn lightly. Think twice before using your horn to say "hello" to a pedestrian. The driver in front of you may think you are honking at him. Don't blow your horn at the driver in front of you the second the light turns green. A stressed-out motorist on edge, may be set off. Various kinds of violence begins with a driver honking the horn.

Failure to Turn. In most areas, right-hand turns are allowed after a stop at a red light. Avoid the right-hand lane if you are not turning right.

Parking. Do not take more than one parking space and do not park in a handicapped parking space if you are not handicapped. Don't allow your door to strike an adjacent parked vehicle. When parallel parking, do not tap the other vehicles with your own. Look before backing up.

Headlights. Keep headlights on low beam, except where unlighted conditions require the use of high beams. Dim your lights for oncoming traffic; don't retaliate to oncoming high beams with your own in order to "teach them a lesson." Don't approach a vehicle from the rear with high beams and dim your lights as soon as a passing vehicle is alongside.

Merging. When traffic permits, move out of the right-hand lane of a multi-lane highway to allow vehicles to enter from the on-ramps.

Blocking Traffic. If you are pulling a trailer or driving a cumbersome vehicle that impedes traffic behind you, pull over when you have the opportunity so that motorists behind you can pass. Also, do not block the road while talking to a pedestrian on the sidewalk. This behavior has resulted in violence from angry motorists.

Car Phones. Don't let the car or cell phone become distractions - keep your eyes and attention on the road. These phones can be great for security and convenience, but bad for safety. Talking on the phone

while driving contributes to inattentiveness, which causes many accidents. Some of them are fatal for drivers, passengers and pedestrians. In addition, car-phone users are widely perceived as causing a traffic hazard. If you must talk on the phone while in the car, consider pulling over for a few minutes.

Alarms. If you have an anti-theft alarm on your vehicle, learn how to turn it off quickly. When buying an alarm, select one that turns off after a short period of time.

Eye Contact. If a hostile motorist tries to pick a fight, do not make eye contact. This can be seen as a challenging gesture and can incite the other driver to violence. Get out of the way and do not acknowledge the other driver. If a motorist pursues you, do not go home. Instead, drive to a police station, convenience store, or other public and well-lit location where you can get help.

Program for Repeat Offenders

DMV also has a program for repeat offenders who commit traffic violations with a moving vehicle. It is called the Driver Retraining program and it covers the principles of motor vehicle operation, how attitude contributed to the behavior found in aggressive driving and the need to practice safe-driving behavior. Motorists between 16 and 24 years-old who have two or more moving violations or suspended license convictions are required to attend and successfully pass a driver retraining program. A motorist who is older than 24 years-old and who has three or more such convictions is required to attend and successfully pass a driver retraining program.

The Department of Motor Vehicles would like to thank the AAA for its contribution to the understanding of this critical issue in driving behavior.

Aggressive Driving and Road Rage



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